THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS

ORAL STATEMENT OF
MARSHALL E. PURNELL, FAIA
PRESIDENT-ELECT

"The Role and Responsibilities of the Architect of the Capitol"

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
-
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The American Institute of Architects
1735 New York, Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20006
(202) 626-7507
govaffs@aia.org
www.aia.org

Madam Chairman, members of the subcommittee –good morning, I am Marshall E. Purnell, the President-Elect of the American Institute of Architects. I am honored to testify before you Madam Chairman, and praise you for the steadfast commitment you have to improving the District of Columbia, the city I too, as an architect, am working everyday to improve. On behalf of our 81,000 members and the 281,000 Americans who work for architecture firms nationwide, I would like to thank you for inviting me to testify about what the AIA envisions as the future role and responsibilities of the Architect of the Capitol, as they relate to both the Capitol Visitors' Center and the rest of the Capitol Complex.

As the Subcommittee knows, a Congressional selection commission is interviewing candidates, one of whom the President will select to become the next Architect of the Capitol. This is a major decision, as the next Architect will be in charge of the design and maintenance of the Capitol Complex for the next decade. When you consider the historic significance of this complex, its role as a physical symbol of our democracy, and the important work that goes on here every day, it is clear that the next Architect of the Capitol **must possess the skills to protect this great landmark and ensure the safety, security and health of the thousands of people who work and visit here.**

Throughout its 200 year history, the U.S. Capitol has undergone major transformations to ensure that it meets the growing needs of Congress. At nearly every major stage of the Capitol's physical growth, a professional architect serving as the Architect of the Capitol led the efforts, making sure that our fledgling democracy had a suitable home.

When a changing government required modernizing, enlarging and renovating the Capitol, professional architects who served as Architect of the Capitol answered the call and gave us the great campus that we know and admire today. (I might add that the building in which we are currently sitting, the Rayburn Building, was designed and built at a time when the Architect of the Capitol was *not* a licensed architect.)

Today the Capitol Complex must once again be transformed. Over the next ten years, the Architect of the Capitol will be called upon to manage a nearly 15 million square foot campus, to oversee major renovations to the existing historic structures and to improve the working conditions (in terms of productivity and comfort) for legislators and their staffs to the level of those of the private sector. The next Architect will need to address post-9/11 security concerns; find ways to conserve energy and mitigate the effects of global warming; install 21st Century technology in 20th and 19th Century buildings; and renovate aging facilities. All this must take place while assuring that the business of America's Legislature is not disrupted.

These are challenges that demand complex and creative solutions. And as history has shown us, Congress finds those solutions when a professional architect is Architect of the Capitol.

Responsibilities/Qualifications

The Architect of the Capitol manages the entire Capitol Complex, including the seven congressional office buildings, the Supreme Court, the Library of Congress and the National Botanical Garden. The Architect is responsible for the safety, security, health, and productivity of all occupants and the thousands of daily visitors to these national treasures. It would not be in the interest of the public, or of the taxpayers, to entrust this responsibility to someone without the formal education, on-the-job training, and professional experience of a licensed professional architect.

Former Architect of the Capitol George White, a licensed architect himself, said it best in a letter to the commission members. Referring to the many duties of the Architect of the Capitol, Mr. White says, "the various necessary characteristics and talents must be based on a foundation of architecture." Mr. White led the design, construction and renovation of many of the Capitol Complex buildings in his nearly 25 years as Architect of the Capitol, so he knows what the job requires better than most anyone. I would ask permission to have Mr. White's letter entered into the record.

[wait for assent from the Chair.]

The job of Architect of the Capitol requires three key sets of skills: leadership, managerial excellence, and design expertise. Architects have all three; in fact, they use them every day to lead the design and construction of buildings in each of your districts.

First, leadership. Licensed professional architects are trained, both in school and on-the-job, in leading multi-disciplinary teams to design, construct and renovate buildings that are safe, secure, productive and energy efficient. A significant number of licensed architects have demonstrated the leadership qualities this job demands. Someone without professional licensure would not command the respect and confidence necessary to lead the office in making the critical decisions affecting the physical conditions of the Capitol complex.

Second, architects have extensive experience in managing large scale construction and renovation projects, often with complex schedules and tight budgets. They coordinate the entire building process from initial sketches to the ribbon-cutting. They serve as the advocate of the building owner to ensure that the structures are designed, constructed and operated in an aesthetically pleasing manner, while balancing all necessary safety, security, and budgetary requirements.

Lastly, architects have the insight and design tools necessary to anticipate the current and future needs of the people who use the buildings they design. They understand the building codes that protect the public health and safety. They understand how to design workplaces that maximize worker productivity. They know how to incorporate the latest technologies and materials into historic structures. Architects do not merely build buildings. They must be knowledgeable about how building features affect the health and productivity of their occupants. At the same time, they must take care to manage the impact of the building within the larger community, especially their impact on the natural environment.

The Architect of the Capitol must understand what it takes to maintain the integrity of these great buildings and their priceless artifacts. Only an architect has the specific knowledge base as well as the full experience and training to handle such an enormous responsibility.

The Architect of the Capitol must also be keenly aware that the Capitol Complex is much more than just a fortress on the Hill; it is a vital part of a large, thriving city, situated in a neighborhood of homes and businesses, with major thoroughfares running right through its heart. This often understated role of the Architect of the Capitol is clearly stated by the inclusion of the Architect of the Capitol as a member of a number of local planning bodies, including the D.C. Zoning Commission, and the National Capital Memorial Commission. He or she must be able to find solutions to the Capitol's challenges that work in tandem with the city's design and planning processes.

Finally, the Architect of the Capitol must be particularly attuned to the intangible beauty and meaning of our Capitol Complex in order to adapt current facilities to future needs while protecting their priceless heritage. The U.S. Capitol Complex should never be treated like a collection of routine office buildings. Our founding fathers envisioned a building that would symbolize our Republic while providing a safe place to conduct our nation's legislative business. That should never change.

The Architect of the Capitol must preserve the sanctity and functionality of the Capitol while balancing the intrinsic security and technological requirements of any building housing a branch of our federal government. Only licensed professional architects possess the skills, education, and training to meet these challenges, and thus be a successful Architect of the Capitol.

Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to appear before you today. I will be happy to answer any questions from the Subcommittee.